



***eNews from Sen. Lisa Murkowski - Vol. 3, Issue 2 : [Visit Senator Murkowski's Web Site](#)***  
***February 9 , 2007***

## **Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to Hold Field Hearing in Alaska**

I have been assigned to serve on the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) for the 110th Congress. My tenure will mark the first time an Alaskan will serve on this prestigious committee. One of my first priorities is to address the lack of access to quality health care we face throughout Alaska.

As part of my efforts I will convene a field hearing of the HELP Committee to discuss the physician shortage facing the state. The hearing will focus on the problems surrounding access to health care services in Alaska and will promote solutions to the physician shortage facing rural America. The hearing will be held in Anchorage on Tuesday, February 20th at 9:00 AM at the Loussac Public Library.

## **Murkowski Re-Introduces Legislation to Protect Alaska's Wild Fish Stocks**

I recognize that our healthy, wild fish stocks are vitally important to Alaska. With that in mind, I recently re-introduced legislation to prohibit the development of any new offshore aquaculture operations in federal waters.

The Natural Stock Conservation Act of 2007 prohibits the development of aquaculture facilities in federal waters until Congress has had an opportunity to review all of the serious implications, and make decisions on how such development should proceed. The bill also requires that federal agencies consult with the governor of any state near the aquaculture site, and that permits be approved by the regional fishery management council with jurisdiction in the region.

Alaska's naturally healthy wild fish species, such as salmon, halibut, sablefish and crab are extremely important to our people and provide for sport, subsistence and commercial uses. We cannot afford a rush to judgment on this issue – it is far too dangerous if we make a mistake. The legislation I have introduced establishes the process for debate on whether to allow offshore aquaculture in the future.

## **Senators Meet with Representatives of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission**

Senator Stevens and I recently met with members of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) to discuss efforts to protect the AEWC's bowhead subsistence whaling quota. The bowhead whale quota will be up for renewal at the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which will be held from May 4th through May 31st, 2007 in Anchorage, Alaska.

Subsistence whaling defines our Eskimo people in Alaska and I will work with Senator Stevens and Congressman Young to make certain that we protect this unique and rich culture.

Alaska Natives in coastal villages in northern Alaska have hunted the bowhead whale for thousands of years. The AEWC works cooperatively with the IWC and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to manage subsistence whaling in Alaska. The Commission is composed of members from 10 subsistence whaling communities.



*AEWC members, along with a representative from the Carribean nation of Antigua & Barbuda, meet with Senator Stevens and Senator Murkowski in the Capitol.*

### **Murkowski Introduces Legislation to Split Ninth Circuit Court**

I have joined Senator Stevens and Senator John Ensign (NV) in introducing legislation to split the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the largest court in the country, because it is overburdened by an unmanageable caseload. Under the bill, Alaska, along with Nevada, Arizona, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, would be part of a new Twelfth Circuit.

The Ninth Circuit has become a circuit where justice is not swift and not always served. The legislation we introduced is intended to bring about the sensible reorganization of the Ninth Circuit. No one court can effectively exercise its power in an area that extends from the Arctic Circle to the tropics. The creation of a new Twelfth Circuit will go far in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the current court and will establish a circuit which is more geographically manageable.

It takes the Ninth Circuit on average almost one year longer to handle a case than other circuit courts around the country. Located in San Francisco, the Court encompasses 20 percent of the population of the United States. Three of the states in its jurisdiction – Nevada, Arizona and Idaho – are among the top five fastest growing states in the nation.

### **Murkowski Supports Increase to Minimum Wage**

I am pleased that my Senate colleagues and I were able to agree upon a bipartisan solution to raise the minimum wage in this country. On February 1 we passed H.R. 2, the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007. The legislation will raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour in three increments over a two-year period. Additionally, it includes tax relief for small businesses to help them continue to grow and create jobs. We have helped provide hard working Americans additional resources needed to meet the escalating cost of living while making certain that small businesses are protected from the increased expense.

## International Polar Year to Begin in March



*The University of Alaska Fairbanks shows its excitement for the upcoming International Polar Year, a scientific program focused on the Arctic and Antarctic set to run from March 2007 to March 2009.*

*[For more information visit ipy.org.](http://ipy.org)*

### **Murkowski Co-Sponsors Social Security Fairness Act**

I have signed on to bipartisan legislation designed to give public employees the opportunity to earn the same Social Security benefits as private sector employees. Under current law, the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Elimination Provision (GPO/WEPP) can greatly reduce the Social Security retirement benefits paid out to retirees who have worked in the public sector. The Social Security Fairness Act of 2007 would repeal these provisions to allow for greater equity in the distribution of retirement benefits for public employees.

Alaska often needs to recruit teachers, public health nurses and other public service professionals from other states. It is unfair for an employee to lose eligibility for Social Security benefits that they would otherwise be eligible for simply because they chose work that serves the community. This creates a serious disincentive for jobs in public service at a time when we need to attract qualified



people. Any meaningful efforts to reform Social Security must address this inequity.

### **Rasmuson Foundation Wins Award from Council on Foundations**

The Council on Foundations recently announced that the Rasmuson Foundation was one of the winners of its inaugural Critical Impact Awards, which recognize family foundation-funded projects that have had a demonstrated impact on the common good and serve as models for others in philanthropy. I am proud that the work that the Rasmuson Foundation has done strengthening Alaskan non-profit organizations has received this national acclaim, and I hope that this award will shed more light on the good work that this great organization does for our State.

[For more information about the Rasmuson Foundation visit their website.](#)

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*Senator Murkowski meets with Bono to discuss strategies to combat AIDS and Malaria worldwide.*



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